

## Pentecost 20 Year A

Matthew 22:15-22

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and *show deference to no one*; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.

Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "*Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.*" When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. (emphasis added)

**Prayer:** "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer."

**Homily:**

*"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's,  
and to God the things that are God's."*

In these waning weeks of our Presidential campaign season,  
We've heard about what one person will do or won't do.  
We've heard about what we'll give up, and what we get to keep.  
But, we've heard nothing about  
What we are supposed to give to God.

So much chatter. Too little thought and too much confusion.

In Jesus' day people asked the same questions that we ask today:

*What do I get to keep?*

*What belongs to the emperor?*

*What will the emperor do for me?*

Some Americans say we pay too many taxes.

Others say Government does too little.<sup>i</sup>

Most of us don't look forward to April 15.

We probably don't want to pay our taxes.

But we pay them anyway.

And *what is our return on that investment?*

Clean air and water.

Yellowstone National Park.

Yosemite.

Nice, safe beaches in Texas, Florida and California.

Dams that save water and let us fish or go water skiing.

Our Highways.

Our military, to keep evil at bay.

People in space, and deep under the sea.

Great universities. <sup>ii</sup>

Some say that our government caters to huge corporations.

And it kind of does.

Some say that those corporations are too powerful.

Maybe some are.

Some say we need to reign in Amazon, Big Tech

and the Billionaires. <sup>iii</sup>

But those corporations supply millions of

good paying jobs, and job security.

In a month or so *We the People will decide*

who will live in *our* White House.<sup>iv</sup>

That's what happens with *free* elections!

*“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s,  
and to God the things that are God’s.”*

If you look at a coin, who do you see?

Some President or some national hero.<sup>v</sup>

But you won’t see an emperor or a King.

Even though Kings and Queens may be beloved figureheads,  
Ancient Rome is gone.

*We aren’t anybody’s subjects.* <sup>vi</sup>

Instead, we are an *“almost chosen people”*<sup>vii</sup>.

America! America! God mend thine every flaw,

Confirm thy soul in self-control, Thy liberty in law!

*Thy Liberty in law.*

I am a husband, a daddy, a priest, and a recovering attorney.

Those words still mean something to me.

*Thy Liberty in law. Our law.*

Springing from the wit and wisdom,

The gullibility and frailty of people that we freely elect.<sup>viii</sup>

*Give to God the things that are God’s.*

In Jesus’ day<sup>ix</sup>, Caesar laid down the law.

The law was about whatever Caesar wanted  
and Caesar claimed.

*Caesar took, and the people gave.*<sup>x</sup>

And so, when Jesus reminded his followers:

“Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s,  
and to God the things that are God’s. ”<sup>xi</sup>

Nobody really understood what he was talking about.

And sometimes we still don’t.

*What does belong to God? What belongs to Caesar?*

Let’s look at Jesus’ remarkable last week in Jerusalem.

- On *Sunday* he triumphantly entered Jerusalem. <sup>xii</sup>  
On a donkey!
- On *Monday*, he overturned the money changers’ tables <sup>xiii</sup> and  
threw the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the  
Herodians<sup>xiv</sup> out of the Temple.
- But, by *Tuesday*, he was back,  
preaching, teaching and praying.

Jesus was the Energizer Bunny of Saviors! He just wouldn’t quit.

*All of his last week* Jesus stood up

for the people who gave and gave and gave.

And He ticked off their Leaders<sup>xv</sup> ... who took and took and took.

He upset the Leaders who took from the waiters and the fry cooks.

He upset the Leaders who took from the carpenters, and the police,  
and the tent makers, and the ship owners and the weavers.

He upset the Leaders who took from those  
who had no voice and had no vote.

The Takers had great deal for a long, long time.

But then came the rabble rousing, miracle working Rabbi  
From a run-down dustbowl town called Nazareth.

The Takers were not happy. They were mad and they were desperate.

So, they came after Jesus, *like bats out of hell.*

*Jesus of Nazareth was such a brave man.*

By Friday, he was hanging from a cross.

When those powerful men challenged Jesus about paying taxes,  
he knew what lay ahead:

betrayal, arrest, torture, and crucifixion.

*But* he still blew them out of the water.

*“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s,  
and to God the things that are God’s.”*

This Gospel isn't about Jesus' tax policy.

It's about Jesus reminding us that even though

*Government and Taxes are necessary.*<sup>xvi</sup>

*We are made in God's image, and we belong to Him.*<sup>xvii</sup>

As Christians women and men we are called to yield

our wills, and our lusts, and our lives,

to God, and not to the world.<sup>xviii</sup>

- Where there is darkness, let us bring light.
- Where there is fear, let us bring courage.
- Where people are cold, and hungry, let us bring warmth and food.<sup>xix</sup>
- Where there is anger and division, Let us bring peace.<sup>xx</sup>

*AMEN*

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<sup>i</sup> As the recent debates reminded us.

<sup>ii</sup> Life and politics are a bit rocky here in the good old USA. But the United States matters, and without the USA life on planet earth would be immeasurably less.

<sup>iii</sup> Maybe we do need a 21<sup>st</sup> Century version of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act.

<sup>iv</sup> But, meanwhile, the political arguments will rage, and it might feel like government is pitching wildly, from side to side, like a ship caught in a crazy storm.

<sup>v</sup> Like Susan B. Anthony.

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<sup>vi</sup> Like folks were in Jesus' day.

<sup>vii</sup> Abe Lincoln, Trenton, New Jersey February 21, 1861

President-elect Abraham Lincoln spoke separately to each branch of the New Jersey legislature on his inaugural journey to Washington. In the Senate, he referred to Trenton's Revolutionary War heroics and spoke of himself as a "humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle."

"Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Senate of the State of New-Jersey: I am very grateful to you for the honorable reception of which I have been the object. I cannot but remember the place that New-Jersey holds in our early history. In the early Revolutionary struggle, few of the States among the old Thirteen had more of the battle-fields of the country within their limits than old New-Jersey.

May I be pardoned if, upon this occasion, I mention that away back in my childhood, the earliest days of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book, such a one as few of the younger members have ever seen, "Weem's Life of Washington." I remember all the accounts there given of the battle fields and struggles for the liberties of the country, and none fixed themselves upon my imagination so deeply as the struggle here at Trenton, New-Jersey. The crossing of the river; the contest with the Hessians; the great hardships endured at that time, all fixed themselves on my memory more than any single revolutionary event; and you all know, for you have all been boys, how these early impressions last longer than any others.

I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that those men struggled for; that something even more than National Independence; that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come; I am exceedingly anxious that this Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made, and I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be *an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people*, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle.

You give me this reception, as I understand, without distinction of party. I learn that this body is composed of a majority of gentlemen who, in the exercise of their best judgment in the choice of a Chief Magistrate, did not think I was the man. I understand, nevertheless, that they came forward here to greet me as the constitutional President of the United States -- as citizens of the United States, to meet the man who, for the time being, is the representative man of the nation, united by a purpose to perpetuate the Union and liberties of the people. As such, I accept this reception more gratefully than I could do did I believe it was tendered to me as an individual. (emphasis added)

<sup>viii</sup> Love 'em or hate 'em, we the people put them there. Politicians like their jobs! When we speak, they listen.

<sup>ix</sup> ... and in most of human history.

<sup>x</sup> We are called to give to our government, and we are called to give to God. How can we do both? In my life, I've work in the law and I've worked in the Kingdom. Years ago, I learned that I could serve the Kingdom whether I was arguing a case or preaching a sermon. Did I make mistakes? Yes. And That's OK. God mend my every flaw! When you're busy it's easy to make mistakes.

<sup>xi</sup> Back then, everything belonged to the emperor!

<sup>xii</sup> Hosanna! Hosanna!

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<sup>xiii</sup> For the cleansing of the Temple, see Matthew 21:10-17; Mark 11:15-18 and Luke 19:45-48. Not that the choreography of events does vary a bit from Gospel to Gospel.

Read more: <https://www.inquisitr.com/4146053/read-the-easter-story-of-jesus-christs-crucifixion-death-and-resurrection-in-the-bible-for-passion-week/#ixzz6amhEWPwX>

<sup>xiv</sup> The Pharisees were against the Roman occupation government. They thought they spoke for God not for Caesar. They worked with the Herodians, who manipulated Herod, Caesar's puppet king.

<sup>xv</sup> The Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians were the takers.

<sup>xvi</sup> We no longer struggle against an Imperial Caesar, but we do struggle against Caesar's surrogate: The allure of our stuff. The things that we say *we own*, really own us. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Things are in the saddle, and they ride mankind."

<sup>xvii</sup> As the people of God, and followers of Christ, we must both live in the Caesar's world, and we must struggle against it. (Genesis 1:26) We give to Caesar, what is Caesar's, and we give to God, what is God's.

<sup>xviii</sup> With God and through God, we are called to devote our talents, our skills, our unique and marvelous gifts, our time, and our wealth to the service of His people, our children and His creation.

<sup>xix</sup> When we hunger, we come to his table for refreshment. And, when we are refreshed, We go back into the world.

<sup>xx</sup> Let us bring love to those who have known hatred and division.